

TITLE 7 - AGRICULTURE

CHAPTER XVIII - FARMERS HOME ADMINISTRATION
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

SUBCHAPTER Q - ADMINISTRATION

PART 2015 - INFORMATION

SUBPART B - PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTIONS OF
FARMERS HOME ADMINISTRATION EMPLOYEES

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Exhibit A - News Coverage of Emergency Loan Situations

PART 2015 - INFORMATION

SUBPART B - PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTIONS OF
FARMERS HOME ADMINISTRATION EMPLOYEES

§2015.51 Introduction.

The Information program tells the public about agency objectives, services, benefits and accomplishments.

- (a) The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Office of Communication is responsible for the program. The agencies give out the information.
- (b) Send clippings and other reports through the organization to the State Director and the Administrator.
- (c) Information released to the public:
 - (1) Can give explanations for programs or benefits. Do not ask for participation.
 - (2) Is about an institution, not a person. Do not give criticism.
 - (3) Says that discrimination is not allowed in the program.
 - (4) Uses photos and graphics.
- (d) Tell employees that employment in FmHA and participation in FmHA programs are available regardless of race, creed or color. The National Office sends announcements about programs to special interest groups. Ask these groups to tell their members of FmHA services.
- (e) Each County Supervisor and State Director tries to communicate with persons who are eligible for FmHA help.
- (f) Persons can ask for a correction of erroneous or misleading information about them in FmHA publicity. The agency issues the retraction or correction using the means by which the original publicity was given out.

§2015.52 Responsibility.

- (a) County Office. County Supervisors are responsible for giving out information in their areas. They make sure that:

DISTRIBUTION: W, S, C

Administration
Information

RD Instruction 2015-B
§2015.52 (a) (Con.)

- (1) Program information is given to community leaders, including representatives of agencies and organizations which contact possible users of FmHA programs. Use personal contact and the distribution of literature.
 - (2) People eligible for FmHA services are told what is available and where to apply for help.
 - (3) People are told about the Government's activities in their community.
 - (4) Clippings from periodicals and broadcast scripts with significant information about FmHA are sent weekly through State Directors to the National Office.
- (b) State Office. State Directors must keep good relations with the public and interested agencies in their states. They:
- (1) Tell the public and agencies about the FmHA's objectives and services.
 - (2) Make sure that the employees meet their information responsibilities.
 - (3) Make sure that the information given out is accurate.
 - (4) Work with groups who have direct interest in FmHA programs.
 - (5) Send all significant clippings and broadcast scripts from their States to the National Office.
- (c) National Office. The Information Director is responsible for the information program. The Information Director:
- (1) Tells the Administrator, the Administrator's staff, and the State Directors about all public information matters, and
 - (2) Starts a program to give information to the public and to get the cooperation of other agencies.
 - (3) Gives program information to the media. To give out information which has an effect on FmHA employees or borrowers, use the Freedom of Information guidelines (see RD Instruction §2015.57(a) and Subpart F of Part 2018).

- (4) Tells the Administrator about the effectiveness of the program.
- (5) Helps the Administrator make sure that accurate information is given out.
- (6) Gives coordination to the information activities of the FmHA with those of the Office of Communication of the Department and other agency information offices.

§2015.53 Definitions. (Reserved)

§2015.54 Information material.

(a) General explanation.

- (1) Some news stories are:
 - (i) Explanations of the FmHA or its programs.
 - (ii) Reports on achievements or other results the public should know about. Do not give information of which disclosure is not allowed by law or the Freedom of Information Act (see RD Instruction §2015.57(a) and Subpart F of Part 2018).
 - (iii) Emergencies (see Exhibit A).
 - (iv) Reports on available loan and grant funds, amounts and purposes of disbursements and repayments.
 - (v) Plans, program and follow-up reports of official meetings and events for borrowers, employees or cooperating groups.
 - (vi) Appointments of employees and Committeemen, changes in office staffs or locations, office hours, etc.
 - (vii) Publicity about loans for group or community projects that have public significance. Subpart C of Part 2015 is about loan approval. Also, publicity about groundbreakings, dedications, etc.
- (2) Use administrative and education materials:
 - (i) Use pamphlets prepared for borrowers to show FmHA programs to local leaders.

(ii) Use slides and photos prepared to give training to supervisors and Committeemen to tell others about program methods.

(iii) Use displays and charts prepared to give training to supervisors and Committeemen or for use at borrowers' meetings to tell about the program.

(b) Preparation.

(1) The Information Director of the National Office gives the State Directors information materials. State Directors give materials to County Supervisors. Add local information to the general statements. Remove information which does not apply.

(2) There is no restriction on employees regarding style, as used in the materials given to them by the Information Staff.

(3) Facts must be accurate. Statements of agency policy must agree with FmHA policies (see FmHA procedures and materials approved by the Administrator). Give the facts so persons outside of the FmHA can understand them. Make the presentation to fit the audience's interests.

(4) For preparation of materials, see the principles in §2015.51.

(5) The FmHA must not be used for advertising. Do not include the names of commercial institutions and products in information material unless needed for clarity.

(6) Prepare information material for current program activities and needs. Use the most recent available facts and figures. Give answers to inquiries and requests for information.

(c) Methods of distributing information.

(1) Give information to the public and to interested agencies through personal contacts, meetings and talks, letters, pamphlets, bulletins, reports, and the media.

(2) Use your best methods.

(3) Try to use radio and television, especially in emergencies. Employees can go on commercially sponsored broadcasts as representatives of the FmHA. Make sure that it is clear that their appearance is not an endorsement of the sponsors of their products.

(4) Builders and others involved in FmHA programs can make a reference to the agency in their own advertising. Their advertising must be good, true and factual. Advertisements must not make promises which the company cannot keep, such as that the company can get the borrower an FmHA loan.

§2015.55 Clearance.

(a) Materials requiring clearance by the Administrator. This information material must be given clearance in advance by the Administrator:

(1) Material about any nationwide or regional plan or program for which the Administrator has not made a formal announcement of FmHA policy.

(2) Field reports on areas under the jurisdiction of two or more State Offices.

(3) Public information material prepared at all levels for duplication by print.

(4) Public information material prepared in the National Office for duplication by processing.

(b) Materials requiring clearance by State Directors. County Office employees get clearance from the proper State Director for:

(1) Material about any local or statewide plan or program for which the State Director has not made a formal announcement of FmHA policy.

(2) Material about any local or statewide plan or program with other Federal agencies for which a formal announcement of the joint policy has not been made at the state level.

(3) Material prepared for duplication by processing.

(c) Routines.

(1) Obtaining clearance from the Administrator. For National Office, the Finance Office, and State Director's material which needs clearance, get clearance from the Administrator before release. Get clearance in advance about giving out materials. Send the written material to the Administrator through the correct Deputy Administrator, to the attention of the Information Director. For emergencies, get clearance by telephone.

(2) Obtaining clearance from the State Director. For County Office material which needs clearance, get clearance for the material before release from the State Director. Send the written material to the State Director. If clearance is needed from the Administrator, the State Director sends the material to the Administrator. The State Director tells the employee in writing of the action to be taken. For emergencies, get clearance by telephone.

§2015.56 Reports on information needs. Tell the Administrator, through regular channels, of significant developments, problems and special needs for information from the FmHA.

§2015.57 Action concerning investigations and audits.

(a) During investigation. No investigative agency will make a comment on an investigation in progress. It will not give the agency's sources or methods of investigation for a completed report.

(1) County and district employees send inquiries about investigations and audits to the State Office. The State Director can give confirmation if a matter was sent to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for investigation and if the investigation has started.

(2) Neither OIG nor FmHA can give the identities of individuals under investigation. Do not tell any details of the investigation. Send inquirers who want more information to OIG. Tell these inquirers that OIG has restrictions, like those in FmHA, on the release of information.

(3) FmHA personnel have no basis for comment until all administrative action is completed. OIG will not send an inquirer to FmHA for information about an investigation or audit which is not complete.

(b) Administrative action. Office of the Inspector General reports are the property of OIG. An agency can use them for administrative action. Only OIG can give out or make a report of information in them. OIG gives FmHA a final report for administrative action. Completion of the OIG report does not change the restrictions on giving out information. Send questions to the Director, Program Evaluation Staff. Until administrative action by FmHA is completed, the case is "under consideration," and no information on it can be given out by OIG or FmHA.

(c) Public disclosures. If there is interest in audits or investigations of FmHA, the Administrator can authorize a brief statement after all administrative actions are taken. Do not issue a statement until Fiscal, Personnel, Civil Rights, Criminal and Civil issues involving FmHA employees, and programs are closed. Send all inquiries about getting investigative or audit information to the Director, Program Evaluation Staff.

§2015.58 Other information guidelines.

(a) For the use of the Freedom of Information Act for the FmHA, see Subpart F of Part 2018. The general concept is that all information is available except that which is: (1) specifically required by Executive Order to be kept secret; (2) used only for internal personnel rules and practices of the FmHA; (3) specifically stopped from being given out by law (confidential information personal income, 18 U.S.C. 1905); (4) privileged or confidential trade secrets and commercial or financial information; (5) agency memoranda or letters available only to an agency in litigation with FmHA; (6) files of which disclosure is an invasion of privacy; and (7) investigation files except those available by law to a party other than an agency. A request for a list of names of FmHA borrowers and their interest rates must be acknowledged and sent up to the National Office, Attention: Freedom of Information Officer (FOIO). For questions about the disclosure of information ask the FOIO (FTS 436-7807). (Revised 9-22-82, PN 849.)

(b) Subpart A of Part 2015, State Office Information Operations Allowances for Supplies and Equipment.

(c) Subpart C of Part 2015, Announcement of Approval of loans. Grants, or Guaranteed Loans for Rural Projects. (Revised 9-22-82, PN 849.)

§§2015.59 - 2015.100 (Reserved)

Attachment: Exhibit A

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(Revision 1)

(1-21-77) SPECIAL PN

NEWS COVERAGE OF EMERGENCY LOAN SITUATIONS

I Presidential declarations. Give press releases to the media when there is a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration. The National Office tells which counties are involved in a declaration. The proper State or County Offices get clearance from the disaster coordinator and tells the citizens about the available help and the locations of the FmHA offices serving them.

II Secretarial designations. The Department of Agriculture issues news releases when a natural disaster designation is made. If there is no publicity in the state or county within one day of the announcement, release form news stories about the situation. If special coverage is needed, write news stories.

III News releases. The National Office issues standard form stories. County and State Offices get help from the National Office when writing copy.

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